



The Path to Principal

 **Tradewind**
AUSTRALIA

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Introduction



“The Path to Principal” is designed for Australian teachers considering taking their career to a new level. It describes what you will need to understand if you are thinking about applying for Principal roles, including basics about the role itself, skills you will need to master, and various courses you can take to help.

Tradewind Australia is one of Victoria’s leading teacher and social worker recruitment specialists. To produce this paper, we spoke with the experts on Tradewind’s team as well as two ex-Principals, Terry Twomey and Billy Green.



Terry Twomey



Billy Green

Part One: Understanding the Role

Becoming a Principal isn’t for every teacher, and that’s OK. However, for those interested in seniority and leadership, becoming Principal is a worthwhile path. You will have an opportunity not just to shape the educational experiences of young people, but to improve and innovate the system itself, to engage and work with your community, and to help mentor the next generation of teachers.

Required Leadership and Management Skills

A strong knowledge of teaching is required to become a Principal in Australia. You must have good foundational knowledge of the teaching craft, and have experienced a variety of positions within the school environment. However, Principals require more than just teaching ability.

To become a Principal, you will need to master a variety of leadership and management skills not found on the typical teacher's path. These include:



- 1. Finance and accounting:** Principals manage school operations and oversee annual budgets. While others may typically handle payroll, you will need a sound knowledge of budget management and smart investment to ensure your school remains up to date, but does not waste money or run over budget.

- 2. Team leadership and HR:** Leadership and human resource management are vital components of being a good Principal. You will need to understand concepts such as recruitment, organisational structure, the delegation of responsibilities, mentoring others, conflict mediation, and discipline. It may also help to understand the basics of teacher engagement and loyalty: the average cost of hiring a new teacher if they leave within 12 months is 55% of their salary¹. Repeatedly recruiting new employees to cover attrition can quickly and unexpectedly consume the school budget.



- 3. Technology:** Computers and other devices are becoming an increasingly prevalent part of the school administration and learning environments. In fact, from 2002 to 2019 the student-to-computer ratio in Victorian schools tripled, from nearly four students per computer to just over one^{2,3}. You will benefit from a strong knowledge of information technology and smart devices, how they affect your school, and how they will continue to do so in future.

- 4. Strategic thinking and how to set goals:** As a Principal, you will be in charge of steering your school through an uncertain future. The ability to think strategically and set SMART goals - specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound - will help you understand what to do and what to avoid when planning out your school's next steps.



- 5. Relationship management:** A school is often only as strong as its partners in the community, be these teachers, parents, public facilities or businesses. As Principal, you will need to master the ability to form, maintain and develop these relationships to ensure a positive outcome for your school.

To learn more about the job of Principal in Australia, consider reading AITSL's [Australian Professional Standard for Principals](#) whitepaper, which goes into much greater detail than this guide.

¹<http://workplaceinfo.com.au/recruitment/problems-and-challenges/recruiting-costs>

²<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/infrastructure/itsstatsjune02.pdf>

³[https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/infrastructure/Computers_in_Victorian_Government_Schools_\(Census_Statistics_2018\).pdf](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/infrastructure/Computers_in_Victorian_Government_Schools_(Census_Statistics_2018).pdf)

Part Two: Gaining the Skills



1. Postgraduate Training for Future Principals

Postgraduate training is available for future Australian principals. While it isn't a strict requirement, many experts recommend it as a way to learn the basics of the job, and to better understand what it will entail from both a theoretical and practical point of view. Indeed, these days it is rare to see a person going into a Principal role without postgraduate training.

This practical experience in particular will help you face the future pressures of being a Principal, as while it is a highly rewarding job, it can at times be difficult.

If you live in Victoria, there are two institutes in particular where you can gain postgraduate training in this field:



- 1. Australian Catholic University's Master of Educational Leadership:** This course takes one and a half to two years full time study or part time equivalent, and can be done in-person in Melbourne, online, or a blend of both. It explores educational leadership, management and administration, and how they apply to real-world contexts.
- 2. Deakin University's Master of Education - Leadership and Management:** This is a slightly shorter course at one to one and a half years, and can be performed totally online. You will learn about contemporary education issues, and develop knowledge of the responsibilities of those involved in managing an educational organisation.

2. Shadow Your Current Principal

Shadowing your current school leader and potentially even taking on some of their duties is another way to gain direct first-hand experience in the role. Most school Principals who have an interest in developing their teaching staff will be happy to let you help them out in exchange for mentoring and advice.

Tasks you can volunteer to take on could include:



1. Scheduling duties



2. Helping with the budget



3. Chairing school committees



4. Liaising with parents to organise events



3. Lead Extra Curricular Activities and Build Your Network

Given leadership is such a strong component of being a successful Principal, gaining real leadership experience and building a network will be highly valuable on your path to assuming the role.

One way to gain such experience is organising activities and events either outside or within school hours. Any events organised with the community will also help build your reputation, and your network in the area. In fact, building professional networks - both in person and online - is a vital part of becoming a Principal in Australia. Not only can having an established network increase your chance of getting a job, it can make the role easier after you do so. You'll have a wide range of contacts to call upon to help improve the day-to-day life and quality of learning at your school.

Possible activities you could organise include:



1. Fundraisers



2. Sports days



3. School theatre



4. Community workshops

(e.g. educational activities for students, parents or others)



5. Environmental activities

(e.g. tree planting with students, rubbish clean-up on a local beach)



4. Attend Training Workshops and Conferences

Workshops and conferences are a good way to learn more about being a Principal and to keep up to date with the modern schooling environment. Teaching is always changing, and a savvy Principal keeps an eye on shifting trends to identify key investments to make for their school.

One thing to note: Not all the conferences and workshops you will wish to attend will be held locally in Victoria. For instance, while VIT teaching seminars are held across the state, the APPA National Conference moves around each year.

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You may have to travel across the country or even to other countries in order to attend the best events. If you cannot afford these yourself, consider seeking sponsorship from your school or community (e.g. organising a fundraiser) to help subsidise the cost.

Part Three: Getting the Job



The number of school Principal jobs in Australia grew within the last five years, and is expected to grow again in the coming five - indeed, it is anticipated that there will be 12,000 Principal job openings between now and 2024⁴.

Most Principals gain their roles by stepping into the shoes of somebody who is resigning. Job openings can come from new jobs being created (i.e. schools being built), however the majority are those stepping up. Most schools that do not have an immediate successor will advertise the availability, such as on online job boards. Indeed, at time of writing this guide there are over 900 roles listed under 'School Principal' on Seek Australia.

To gain your role as Principal, you may wish to consider first applying to become an Assistant Principal. This is seen by many as the stepping stone to becoming a full fledged Principal, though don't discount the role as just that - many Australians are happy to remain in this position their entire careers, as it is a rewarding job with many of the leadership opportunities of Principal, without the same level of pressure. Additionally, there are a number of flagship programmes specifically designed for aspiring Assistant Principals - if you're interested, consider talking to your school leaders about any such programmes in your area.

⁴ <https://joboutlook.gov.au/Occupation?search=alpha&code=1343>

Conclusion



Being a Principal in Australia is a highly rewarding job with many important responsibilities. As Principal it will be up to you to steer your school, develop and mentor your teaching and administrative staff, and shape the learning experience of future generations.

However, to become Principal you will need a variety of experiences that extend far beyond the four walls of a classroom. These include skills typically found in business leadership, such as finance, HR, IT and strategic thinking.

You can gain these experiences in a variety of ways. Experts recommend gaining postgraduate training, but you can also shadow your current Principal to learn directly from them, and organise or attend events to build numerous other skills.

✦ About Tradewind Australia ✦

Tradewind Australia opened its doors in Melbourne in the year 2000, and has quickly grown to become a leader in teacher and social worker recruitment in Victoria. We are one of the few Casual Relief Teacher recruiters who offer a comprehensive professional development program to support our CRTs as a priority, meaning we can provide a range of incredibly high calibre people at very short notice, all of whom have been trained and vetted, and are ready to teach.



Path to Principal Checklist

Lay out the skills you have that match the AITSL Principal's standard, and the description outlined in this guide.

Lay out the skills you still require.

Gain postgraduate training in educational leadership and management.

Shadow your current Principal and take on some of their duties.

Lead extra curricular activities and events in school and around the community.

Attend a variety of workshops, seminars and conferences to gain more skills.

Talk to your Principal about becoming an Assistant Principal as a stepping stone.



References

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